Gloucestershire: Managing dinner money debt 2013/14

Important Notice

This is important guidance on how to deal with dinner money debts at the end of the academic year. Please can you read this document and follow the instructions to ensure the process is completed accordingly. Please note that depending on where we settle ParentPay income – either centrally with GCC or, if you have your own bank account, the instructions are slightly different. If you have any queries about this please contact the ParentPay Service Desk on 02476 994 820 or email support@parentpay.com

Introduction

Over the summer holidays (9th August 2014) all dinner money debts will be cleared from the school's current dinner money payment item to a separate payment item called 'School Meal Debt 2013/14'. The pupils that end the academic year in debt will be automatically assigned to this payment item, with the amount they owe. This item for payment will appear on the payer's account as a separate item for payment, prompting them to settle their debt.

Please note: If you bank centrally with Gloucestershire County Council please make sure you pay particular attention to areas in this guidance specifically for centrally banked schools.

Preparing for 2013/14 Academic Year Debt Clearance

What you will need to do during the Summer Term:

Leavers:

- ✓ **Start monitoring and chasing debts as you near the end of the term – especially for pupils who are due to leave your school**
- ✓ **Before the last day of term, you will need to run off barcoded debt letters for pupils in debt (only for imminent leavers).** NB. Once you update SIMS with these pupils archived, and subsequently update ParentPay, these pupil's ParentPay accounts will also be archived.

✓ Check the 'School Meal Debt' payment item as soon as possible and ensure the correct bank account is assigned. (Schools that have joined ParentPay in the last 12 months will not have the payment item available for use until the debt process is carried out. You will therefore need to assign your bank account as soon as possible after 9th August).

Gloucestershire Local Authority will be invoicing schools for this debt in September 2014. When payers clear their debts, after 9th August, it should therefore be settled using ParentPay to the school's own bank account (for centrally banked schools, please ensure you use the 6 digit school cost centre code and NOT the normal dinner money payment item of 103183). If there is no bank account assigned, the School Meal Debt payment item will not be visible to payers, so please ensure this is done as soon as possible.

✓ Write off any 2013/14 debts on ParentPay (on the School Meal Debt payment item) that the school does not wish to chase (these may have been settled by cash/cheque last year)

How to check the bank account

To check the bank account to which the new debt payment item is assigned, follow the simple steps below:

- Log into ParentPay
- Click on the 'Payment items' tab
- Find the 'School Meal Debt 2013/14' payment item – check the correct bank account is showing
- Click on the 'Actions' drop down list to edit the bank account if required

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you bank centrally with the LA, please ensure you assign the correct Cost Centre and GL code for your school, so the GCC Finance team knows which school (and account, eg. School Fund) to balance the money against.

If the bank account you wish to use is not set up then please click on the link for guidance on how to add a bank account and what evidence you may need to submit to ParentPay. Due to the recent update to the ParentPay Manager screens, please download the revised complete user manual and refer to the 'Managing Bank Accounts' section (page 29): ParentPay Complete User Manual

NB. This process requires the school to send ParentPay evidence of ownership of the account before we will be able to set it live, so there may be a delay until payers see this item for payment in their ParentPay account.

How to save a list of debtors

We would advise you to keep a copy of the debtors handy for future reference.

- Log into ParentPay
- Click on the 'Payment Items' tab, select the Dinner Money payment item > View 'Assigned People' under 'Actions' > Save as an excel document

How to clear debts on ParentPay

Parents/Carers that have debts to clear will automatically have the option to clear their own balances by paying online, or by PayPoint (with a barcoded letter), so there is no adjustment needed by the school in these cases.

Parents can also pay by cash/cheque (if these are payment options are allowed by the school). Cash or cheque payments should be credited to the pupil's account to clear their balances.

For **centrally banked schools** you should then forward the normal banking slip to GCC Schools Finance. This slip needs to contain the correct description, cost centre code and GL code to where this money should be allocated to. It should **not** make any reference to Dinner Money or School Meals.

The school may wish to use their own discretion and decide not to chase some debts. Please ensure you clear this balance on ParentPay by manually clearing the balance and adding notes for audit purposes, the payer's account will no longer appear in debt. To manually clear debts, please follow these steps:

- Log into ParentPay
- Go to 'Finance', then 'Record adjustments'
- Choose payment item: Select the dinner money debt service
- Choose Method: Credit
- Find the pupil(s), enter the amount needed to clear the debt and add relevant notes for audit purposes

NB. If your school was subject to debt clearance last academic year (2012/13), you may still find a remaining balance against the school debt payment item on the system. If you no longer wish to pursue this debt, please clear it as per the instructions above. You will need to tick the 'Include leavers' box to show this debt.

Debt payments from leavers

The majority of leavers should have cleared their debts before they left your school last year, however there may be some debt, which also needs to be managed to ensure you recoup as much debt as possible. Leavers do not have the option to repay debts online, but you can receive payments by cash or cheque to clear their accounts.

When you return to school in September, leavers will not show on the normal school meal or debt payment item, but you can check what leaver debt you had by clicking on the 'You have x people in debt' in 'My notifications' on your My ParentPay homepage and tick the 'Include leavers' box.

IMPORTANT:

To minimise leaver's debts, schools are advised to closely monitor balances before the end of the pupil's last academic year.

How to send a debt reminder letter

Please find a template letter attached as Appendix A of this document for you to edit and use for your school. This letter can also be used by PayPoint payers as it contains the PayPoint barcode that is unique to the School Meal Debt payment item. Once you have written off the debts that you are NOT chasing, please follow the instructions below to send a reminder letter to the remaining debtors:

- Log into ParentPay
- Click on the 'Communication' tab
- Click on 'Create letter'
- Give the message run a name, e.g. 'Debt reminder 2013/14'
- Tick the required communication method boxes as appropriate (printed letter)
- Once you have ticked the appropriate box, copy the letter template from Appendix A and paste it into the 'body text' area on ParentPay
- Continue until the last screen, to select the debt payment item and add recipients
- Under Add group: Select 'Payment item – all assigned', wait for the screen to refresh
- Then select the 'School Meal Debt 2013-/14' from the payment item drop down box
- If you want to double check the debtors that will be receiving a reminder, you can check the recipient list at the foot of this page before printing

Support

If you have any queries regarding the amount of debt that you are being invoiced for in September, please contact the Gloucestershire County Council on building.helpdesk@gloucestershire.gov.uk If you need any assistance in setting up bank accounts or how to interrogate the ParentPay system to establish debt, or run debt letters, please contact ParentPay Support on 02476 994 820 or email support@parentpay.com

Appendix A – Debt reminder letter (for pupils still on roll at your school)

This letter is a template for you to use, please edit this letter to suit your school's needs/style. Please ensure you add a due date to encourage prompt payment. Elements of the letter may not apply, eg. accepting cheques.

<suppliername/>
<date/>

Parent or carer of <consumerforename/> <consumersurname/>, Class <class/>

Dear Parent/Carer

At the end of the last academic year, your child had a debt on their school meals account totalling <balance/>. We would like to ask that this balance is paid by [insert date]. The school is liable for these debts and has settled this debt with the Local Authority, however this impacts on school budgets, so we would appreciate prompt payment.

There are several ways you can pay this debt:

Online: Log into your ParentPay account and pay the balance showing against the **'School Meal Debt'** service (after 9th August 2014)

PayPoint: Pay at any PayPoint outlet using cash and the barcode at the foot of this letter. Your nearest PayPoint stores can be found by checking the PayPoint website (store locator): www.paypoint.co.uk/storelocator

Cash or cheque: Please hand cash into the school office (Please write the child's name clearly on the envelope and the amount). Cheques should be made payable to [insert text required]

If you not in a position to pay this debt at the moment, or need a reminder of your ParentPay account log in details, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

If your child has now left the school, you may not have the option to pay online once we have updated schools records. Therefore please either pay at a PayPoint store or by sending the school a cheque.

Please ensure your child's account stays in credit in the new academic year. If you think you may be eligible for Free School Meals, please contact the school office and we will be able to advise you how to check your eligibility and register for these benefits.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Head Teacher
<paypointbarcode/>